

## **HVS ECO SERVICES' ECOTEL® CERTIFICATION**

### **Introduction**

The ECOTEL® Certification is a third-party seal of approval awarded by HVS Eco Services to hotels and motels that "demonstrate a heightened level of environmental sensitivity." HVS Eco Services, an environmental consulting firm serving the hospitality industry, created the ECOTEL® Certification in November 1994 and has since awarded the certification to less than 5 percent of the hotels that have applied.

The ECOTEL® Certification was developed in response to a heightened level of environmental consciousness among travelers, as illustrated by the US Travel Data Center's studies, which show that 87 percent of consumers claim to support environmentally-oriented travel companies. Demand for eco-tourism prompted both travelers and hoteliers to wonder what aspects and what level of environmental performance were considered "good." The ECOTEL® Certification helps establish a benchmark for environmental performance, as well as a way for hotels' own environmental claims to be independently verified.

According to HVS Eco Services, undergoing the ECOTEL® evaluation can help to highlight potential environmental and conservation opportunities that can result in significant cost savings. In addition, some ECOTEL®s (certified hotels) are reporting increases in bookings for meetings and room reservations since attaining the certification.

### **Program Summary**

The ECOTEL® Certification consists of a five-globe rating system where each globe represents a different category of environmental performance: solid waste management; energy management; water conservation and preservation; employee education and community involvement; and legislative compliance and native land preservation. Hotels can be evaluated in any of these categories, although most choose all five. Hotels need only one globe to be considered an "ECOTEL®". Physical facilities and operating procedures are evaluated according to HVS Eco Services' criteria which were developed in consultation with such hospitality and environmental organizations as The Rocky Mountain Institute, The Ecotourism Society, Certified Utility Consultants, and Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. HVS Eco Services reports that its criteria are reviewed and updated quarterly as well as in response to periodic technological innovations. Although the criteria are proprietary information, evaluated hotels are briefed on which specific certification requirements they failed to satisfy. Based on the evaluation, hotels can be awarded an ECOTEL® Globe Award for each qualifying category.

The ECOTEL® evaluation process begins with a preliminary telephone interview to determine whether a hotel is a viable candidate for certification. The hotel might be asked to submit to HVS Eco Services documentation regarding its environmental program, or to describe specific

environmental projects. Once a basic level of environmental performance is determined, an on-site inspection is then performed by HVS Eco Services personnel who inspect the physical plant and conduct interviews with management, employees, and possibly the local community. Management and employee perspectives help to give evaluators a realistic picture of the hotel operations, while interviews with the local community are conducted as part of their evaluation for the "employee education and community involvement" and the "legislative compliance and native land preservation" globes.

ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> evaluates hotels according to a three-tiered scoring system in which the first round addresses the most basic standards of environmental performance, the second awards points for more advanced levels, and the third gives points for outstanding environmental programs. Hotels must earn all of the first-round points, but only 75 percent of the second-round points. Third-round points are bonuses that count toward the second-round requirement. This variable scoring system was created to allow for the individuality of different environmental programs, while ensuring a minimum performance level. In addition, the scoring system is adapted for each hotel's size and location. At the end of every evaluation, whether or not certification is granted, hotel management is presented with a Justification Rating summarizing the results of the evaluation, as well as an Environmental Action Plan describing methods to improve and ensure the longevity of the hotel's environmental program.

Certified ECOTEL<sup>®</sup>s undergo scheduled inspections every two years, as well as surprise visits to ensure continued environmental performance. ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> Certification can be revoked at any time if there is substandard performance.

The ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> Certification conveys a number of promotional benefits upon its recipients, including a license to use the ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> logo in signage and marketing. HVS Eco Services promotes its member hotels through regional and international events highlighting the ECOTEL<sup>®</sup>s, feature stories in international travel magazines, and exhibitions at international conferences. ECOTEL<sup>®</sup>s are listed in a referral system, a number of international travel directories, and the ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> Internet Directory. HVS Eco Services also provides information and ongoing consulting to certified hotels on environmental products and services, environmental conferences, and industry events.

ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> evaluations are completely voluntary; hotels must request to be reviewed. The ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> program was originally funded largely by HVS Eco Services' consulting practice. HVS Eco Services now requires an evaluation fee starting at \$1,000. Fees are based on the size of the hotel and are negotiable to accommodate smaller hotels that might have difficulty affording the evaluation. Once the evaluation is completed, HVS Eco Services' consulting practice can be further contracted to provide expertise on improving a hotel's environmental performance.

## Program Methodology

The ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> Certification program was a natural extension of HVS Eco Services' hotel consulting practice into the environmental field. The ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> performance criteria were determined through consultation with such hospitality and environmental organizations as the Rocky Mountain Institute, the Ecotourism Society, Certified Utility Consultants, and Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. The criteria are proprietary information of HVS Eco Services, and are therefore not disclosed to the public. However, a summary of the criteria is available. The criteria cover such areas as the extraction and processing of raw materials, manufacturing, transportation and distribution, product uses, reuse, maintenance, recycling, final disposal, ingredient or materials restrictions, and the environmental performance of production processes.

A numerical rating system, used to quantify the findings, is adapted for each hotel's size and location. It consists of a primary, secondary, and tertiary qualifying round. Hotels must receive all of the primary qualifying points in order to be considered for the secondary points, 75 percent of which must be attained to achieve the ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> Globe Award. This 75 percent requirement allows for flexibility within the prescribed standards by rewarding hotels for good environmental performance despite differences among individual programs. The tertiary round awards bonus points to those hotels with outstanding environmental programs.

ECOTEL<sup>®</sup> evaluates hotels in any of the five performance categories listed below, per the hotel's request; most request all five. A hotel must earn the Globe Award in at least one category to be considered an "ECOTEL<sup>®</sup>." The categories are as follows:

- Solid Waste Management
- Energy Management
- Water Conservation and Preservation
- Employee Education and Community Involvement
- Legislative Compliance and Native Land Preservation

## References

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## **Product Categories**

Hotels